



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **24 indicted in ICE-led probe into largest marriage fraud scheme in Utah history** *Investigation targeted local network that arranged sham marriages for Vietnamese aliens*

SALT LAKE CITY – A 79-count federal indictment unsealed here today charges 24 individuals, mostly from the Salt Lake City area, for their role in the largest and most sophisticated marriage fraud scheme ever uncovered in Utah.

At a news conference this afternoon, the United States Attorney for Utah, Brett L. Tolman, announced the initial results of the 18-month multi-agency investigation leading to the indictment. Tolman was joined at the news conference by Charles DeMore, special agent in charge for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in San Francisco; Thomas Depenbrock, special agent in charge of the San Francisco field office for the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security; and Mario Ortiz, district director for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in Denver.

The 24 defendants charged in the case allegedly recruited United States citizens to travel to Vietnam to enter into fictitious engagements or marriages to facilitate the illegal entry of the Vietnamese nationals into the United States. According to the indictment, some of the fraudulent marriages involved Vietnamese nationals who were already here. The charges in the indictment include conspiracy to defraud the United States; alien smuggling; marriage fraud; visa fraud; and aggravated identity theft.

“The scheme alleged in this indictment takes the concept of ‘arranged marriage’ to a new level,” said U.S. Attorney Tolman. “The defendants exploited a process intended to assist families. Their subversion was motivated by greed. The purpose of this indictment is two-fold. First, we want to disrupt and punish this criminal activity. Second, it is important to all of the agencies involved in this case that we restore the integrity of the marriage visa process.”

Yesterday, ICE agents, aided by personnel from the Diplomatic Security Service, arrested 21 of the suspects charged in the case. The remaining defendants are still being sought.

“Marriage fraud and other forms of immigration benefit fraud are potential threats to public safety because they create a vulnerability through which illegal aliens, criminals, and terrorists can enter the United States,” said DeMore, special agent in charge of the ICE office of investigations in San Francisco, which includes Utah. “This case sends a clear message that if you commit marriage fraud, there is not going to be a honeymoon.”

“Marriage and visa fraud are serious crimes with substantive national, economic, and personal consequences,” said Depenbrock, special agent in charge of the State Department’s Bureau of Diplomatic Security San Francisco Field Office. “These crimes violate the legal immigration process and threaten the integrity of the system for others who abide by U.S. immigration laws.”

According to the indictment, the defendants paid U.S. citizens between \$500 to \$10,000, in addition to travel and other expenses, to enter into the fictitious engagements or marriages. The indictment further alleges that the defendants told some of the U.S. citizen recruits that the arrangements were immoral, but not illegal, and that they would be helping Vietnamese nationals escape “a terrible situation.”

The indictment states the defendants charged the Vietnamese nationals up to \$30,000 to orchestrate the sham marriages or engagements with the U.S. citizens. The defendants would then file fraudulent immigrant visa petitions on behalf of the aliens. To make the relationships appear legitimate, the indictment describes how the defendants accompanied the citizen recruits to Vietnam and organized elaborate engagement ceremonies. The defendants also allegedly compiled “evidence” of the relationship to submit with the immigration applications, including staged wedding photos.

The initial lead in the case came from a private citizen. ICE asked a USCIS Fraud Detection and National Security (FDNS) officer to look into the tip. Ultimately, more than 1,000 documents, including between 400 and 600 applications or petitions, were reviewed as part of the investigation.

“National security is our number one priority. We’re very proud to work closely with other components in the Department of Homeland Security to detect fraud,” said Ortiz, Denver USCIS District Director. “It also shows the commitment from the general public. This big case started with just one tip from a local citizen.”

So far, only those who recruited the U.S. citizens to participate in the marriage fraud scheme have been indicted. Charges have not been filed against any of the “recruits” or “petitioners.” Prosecutors say the U.S. citizens have admitted their involvement and are cooperating with the investigation. A final decision about whether they will be charged has not been made.

The maximum penalties for the charges in the case range from five years for the marriage fraud and conspiracy violations to up to 10 years for alien smuggling and visa fraud. Prosecutors are also seeking forfeiture of property and other assets obtained from the criminal conduct as well as a monetary judgment of more than \$1.3 million, the amount of proceeds believed generated by the criminal scheme.

Those charged in the indictment are: Hoa Thanh Vo, age 40, of West Valley City; Henry Ngoc Nguyen, age 45, of West Jordan; Buu Van Troung of West Jordan; Ngoc Hoa Huynh (aka “Noa,” “Nora,” “Norwa”), age 33, of West Jordan; Huu Luong Huynh (aka “John Huynh”), age 31, of South Jordan; Danh Huy Do, age 33, of West Valley City; James Hugh McClurg, age 48, of Sandy; Tinh Huu Cao, age 37, of West Jordan; Lanh Ta Huynh, age 52, of West Jordan; Dzung Tan Huynh (aka “Jace”), age 43, of Sandy; My Chau Tran (aka “Leelee,” “Lily”), age 29, of South Jordan; Hue Thi Huynh, age 40, of West Jordan; Tri Dung Minh Nguyen (aka “Yoon”), age 40, of West Valley City; Mischelle Lien Polish, age 33, of Murray; Cuc Thi Nguyen (aka “Kathy Nguyen) of South Jordan; Billy Chanh Tran, age 47, of Las Vegas, Nevada; Thi Tho Nguyen, age 55, of Salt Lake City; Gary Minh Nguyen, age 38, of West Valley City; Johnathan Quy Tran, age 49, of Salt Lake City; Winona Juan Fischer (aka “Wendy Fischer”), age 56, of Salt Lake City; Dung Lee, age and residence unknown; Hieu Dinh Hoang, age 34, of West Valley City; Tamy Ta, age 56, of Sandy; and Yen Thi Pham, age 35, of Sandy. Most of the defendants are naturalized U.S. citizens.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*